

## Graduate Proseminar

### *Interview Questions for Prospective Advisors & Grad Programs*

Many PIs provide guidelines for prospective students on their academic websites. Read that carefully to avoid asking for information that is readily available. Aside from the PI, who may give you an hour (rarely more), interview appointments are typically in 15–30 min time slots. Consequently, creating a prioritized list of questions within each category below will make the best use of everyone's limited time. Some questions are better answered by current or recent graduates from the lab vs. the PI or other faculty. If granted the opportunity, ask the same questions to different groups (PI, other faculty, program coordinator, current and former grads, etc.). If the responses are similar, the information is likely true. But if responses differ, that suggests individualistic experiences to similar sets of circumstances.

### **Lab Culture | Mentoring Philosophy, Style, & Expectations | Prior Successes**

- Can you describe the lab culture and its major strengths?
- What is your mentoring philosophy or mentoring style?
- What are your expectations for graduate students in your lab? Are there any competencies or special skills would you like me to develop during my time in your lab?
- In general, do you assign students to specific projects, work with them to develop an idea, or have them create their projects entirely on their own?
- What ongoing or forthcoming projects are you particularly excited about?
- How often do you meet with your students? Are these in groups or one-on-one meetings? What do you typically discuss? What is your preferred mode of communication?
- Are there other labs in the program or on other campuses with which you and your grads routinely collaborate or interact? Who are the faculty most commonly serving on the committees of your students? [Check them out too, as they may become important sources of support in the future.]
- What are your thoughts about work–life balance?
- How long does it take for grads to finish in your lab (mean, range)? Have any students left your lab without finishing and, if so, what were the circumstances? Have you ever asked any students to leave your lab and, if so, what were the circumstances?
- How would you identify when a grad may be struggling and what might you do about it?
- What jobs, careers, grad programs, postdocs, etc. have former grads in your lab pursued after earning their degrees?

## Culture of Program & Institution

- What are the strengths of the department or program? Weaknesses? What would you say is the reputation of the grad program from the perspective of an external reviewer?
- What courses in the program do grads really like and which do they fear, avoid, or dislike?
- Are grads, faculty, staff, and undergrads generally happy at this institution, program, and living in this region/town/city?
- Are grads generally supportive of one another and is there a sense of community among them in the department or program? Do the grads engage in off-campus socializing (e.g., shared extracurricular activities)? Are there regular opportunities for social interactions between grads and faculty?
- What is the campus attitude/atmosphere toward diversity, equity, and inclusion? Has there been a recent program assessment of the success of grads from minoritized groups relative to traditionally served grads?
- What things do you encourage visitors to do when they visit your campus, region/town/city?
- Have grads from where I am from experienced any problems transitioning to life on your campus, region/town/city?
- Are there any people in your department or program who you dislike or avoid? Why?

## Financial Opportunities & Concerns

- Are there tuition waivers? If so, what do they cover? What is their duration? Are they contingent on any expectations or conditions?
- What are the known or likely sources of funding for my project? Will I be expected to use personal funds if I/we are unsuccessful securing extramural funding?
- Are there TA/GA/RA positions available in the department or program? If so, are grads offered to select their preferred courses, days, and/or times?
- Is your lab currently receiving extramural funding for any projects? Are there any proposals in review or soon to be submitted? How do you anticipate the funding situation in your lab to change during my time as a graduate student?
- What is the cost of living in the region? What is the housing situation near campus in terms of pricing, availability, and sharing homes or apartments with roommates? Are there campus resources (e.g., web-based bulletin boards) for finding housing or roommates?
- Are there on-campus funds available for grads to travel to professional meetings? Are there on-campus funds for graduate research? Are there other types of financial aid, awards, honors, or scholarships commonly received by grads in your program?